

# South Carolina First Steps e-Spotlight

June 10, 2016



## Horry County Child Care Directors Attend National Early Childhood Leadership Conference in Chicago

From May 12th—14th, the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership held its Leadership Connections™ National Leadership Conference in Chicago, IL. The conference brought together early childhood administrators, family child care providers, trainers, technical assistance specialists, and policymakers to hear inspiring keynote speakers, take part in a public policy forum, attend skill-building sessions, and network with other leaders in the field. Participants could choose to attend sessions in eight tracks: Administrative Leadership, Early Childhood Policy, Instructional Leadership, Leadership Essentials, Social Emotional Development, Professional Well-Being, Supervision, Coaching, Mentorship, and Technology. In total, 556 individuals attended from 27 different states, including three staff members from Horry County First Steps (HCFS) and the six child care center directors who participate in HCFS' Quality Enhancement program.



*Horry County Child Care directors and HCFS staff at the McCormick Center's Leadership Connections National Leadership Conference in Chicago, IL.*



*Child Care Director Monica Moss and Keynote Speaker, Michael Harris.*

First Steps' Quality Enhancement (QE) is intended to produce measurable improvements in the quality of care provided to young children. Participating child care providers must serve a significant percentage of at-risk children, and are selected through a competitive process that requires a strong level of commitment to the QE process. The QE program components include the following: on-site Technical Assistance at least twice monthly, pre/post observations of the classrooms utilizing the Environmental Rating Scales, funding to purchase needed materials and supplies, and coordination of efforts with other state/community-level entities. HCFS also has prioritized leadership development for its QE center directors and has worked to provide professional support for them in supervision, staff development, and various other administrative functions. Amy Breault, Executive Director of HCFS, saw the McCormick Center Leadership Connections as an incredible opportunity for these directors to attend a nationally-acclaimed conference to further develop their leadership skills.

At the conference, the child care center directors went to sessions focused on advocacy, early education policy, and administrative and instructional leadership. Several opportunities for networking were incorporated in the conference schedule, allowing attendees to connect and share ideas with early education peers from across the country. A highlight was touring a NAEYC-accredited child care center in Chicago where they were able to visit classrooms and talk to administrators and staff. During the tour, Ms. Breault encouraged directors to focus on what they could take back to implement in their own centers.

Directors left the conference feeling motivated and eager to put into practice what they learned. Annie Dixon, Director of Cutie Pies Inc. – Surfside, said: "I left the training in Chicago feeling inspired and more than ready to head back to my center to implement so many new things and ideas. The speakers were all great in their field so it was very educational." One center director has already taken steps to implement what she learned at the conference, designing and implementing a staff climate survey to help improve staff relationships and her center's overall environment. To boost staff morale, she also created a "praise box" for staff where they will write down brief notes when they see colleagues doing something praiseworthy. A note is then anonymously selected every week, read aloud, and that staff member will receive a highly-coveted parking space at the center for the week. Overall, the conference allowed directors to view child care from a national perspective, learn from early childhood experts, and find inspiration to drive improvement at their centers.

**"I left the training in Chicago feeling inspired and more than ready to head back to my center to implement so many new things and ideas."**

**- Annie Dixon, Director of Cutie Pies Inc.**

**For more information on HCFS Quality Enhancement program please contact HCFS Executive Director Amy Breault at 843-488-3336. For more information on the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership's Leadership Connections Conference™, visit their website by [clicking here](#).**